

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

***NIGERIAN CORE GRAMMARS IN GLOBAL  
COMMUNICATION: ANY GLIMMER OF HOPE  
IN THIS LOOMING ARMAGEDDON?***

**AN INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**BY**

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## **0. Preamble**

May I begin this lecture by appreciating some individuals who played key roles to get me to stand here today. First, I sincerely appreciate the crucial roles played by my parents, Late Chief Maxwell A. Ndimele-Nwaughu and Late Mrs. Augusta N. Ndimele-Nwaughu, to see that I chose the path of education.

I thank my first teacher, Late Mr. Okezie, who at the first encounter identified me as a star of good hope. He risked sanction from school inspectors by admitting me into Primary 1 even when my right hand could not touch my left ear – a crude test for maturity for school enrolment in those days.

That I am a professor today is partly due to the freshmen orientation lecture delivered by Professor Chidi T. Maduka in October 1981 at the School of Humanities. As freshmen (“Jambites” as they are informally called), we were mesmerised by Professor Maduka’s lecture entitled: “The Intellectual and the Drama of Social Change: The Writer’s Insight”. He spoke so eloquently that I vowed to be a lecturer. And that was how the journey began.

I cannot forget a God-sent woman who adopted me as an academic grandson and kept me under her immense care for an excellent academic mentorship for 13 years. I rose faster than and became a professor before any of my contemporaries because of the tutelage

from this “**rare gem, too good to live among mortals**”. She initiated me into the “research cult” when she drove us (her graduate students) in her Volkswagen (beetle) car to attend the Annual Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria in Maiduguri in 1986 and to Calabar in 1990 where she encouraged me to write two controversial papers drawn from my doctoral research which was in progress then: (a) “Towards an Adequate Account of the Attraction Site” and (b) “Headed Chains and the Parasitic Gap Phenomenon” and watched me present them to her admiration. It hurts that today’s event is happening behind Professor Kay Williamson who laid the foundation.

I also want to appreciate the Vice-Chancellor, Professor J.A. Ajiienka, for graciously approving my request to present my inaugural lecture on the eve of the symposium which was to be organised in my honour on Thursday, 31 October, 2013. But this was not to be because of an ASUU-FGN industrial dispute. The members of my family (both nuclear and extended) have been helpful in several respects. I also appreciate them, particularly my girlfriend and wife, Joy Adamma. To the Creator of the universe, I give all the glory.

### **1. Now to the Business of the Day**

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I am told that an inaugural lecture is a maiden address by a newly appointed professor to announce his arrival and to present his research agenda for the new chair that he occupies. Unfortunately, however, and because of the long queue and other mortal distractions, many of us do not have the opportunity to announce our arrival early enough. It hurts to say that it has taken a decade for me to formally let the academic world know, through an inaugural lecture, my research agenda for the balance of my sojourn here.

I am pleased to announce that this is the third in the series of inaugural lectures from our Department. The first from our Department and the 5<sup>th</sup> in the University of Port Harcourt was by the late Professor Kay R.M. Williamson delivered on Tuesday, 7 April, 1987. The title of her lecture was: *The Pedigree of Nations: Historical Linguistics in Nigeria*. The second was by Professor E.N. Emenanjo delivered in 1988 with the title: *Linguistics, Language and the Nation*. Both were my teachers in whom I am well pleased and to whom I owe great respect. Frankly, I have an uphill task here today. The two big international masquerades from my Department have appeared here and you heard them. May I appeal, therefore, that you do not judge me by their standard. I am just their baby.

The lecture is structured in four parts. The first is an overview of what I profess. The second part focuses on the problem. The third part is concerned with my contributions to solving the problem as well as my professional activities and research agenda. The fourth part is what I refer to as the memory verses and the way forward.

## **2. Our Field**

My area of specialization is comparative grammar – a relatively new area of focus in language studies. Comparative grammar is a branch of study which strives to understand the nature of human language by drawing samples of natural utterances from a wide range of languages with a view to noting the shared (common) features of all languages as well as the inter-linguistic variations which exist across languages. It is concerned with probing into the relationship between language, human mind, and the brain. The effort is to integrate current research in human communication into the burgeoning field of neuroscience. Comparative grammarians are concerned with “the idea of studying language as a natural object, a cognitive capacity that is part of the biological endowment of our species, physically

present in the human brain and accessible to study within the guidelines of natural sciences” (Chomsky, 2002:ix).

The basic concerns of comparative grammarians are, as contained in the following questions:

- a. Why is language species-specific, i.e. why it is only man that possesses language?
- b. Why can't other animals, including our closest relatives – the apes, monkeys, chimpanzees and other primates – speak a language?
- c. Why and to what extent do languages differ from each other?
- d. Are there basic differences in the minds of speakers of different languages?
- e. What knowledge does a person who speaks a language possess?
- f. What is the relationship between language and cognition?
- g. What is it in the mind or brain of humans that makes the acquisition of language possible?
- h. Which part of the human brain is concerned with the acquisition of language?
- i. What happens to the speech of an individual whose relevant part of the brain for language acquisition is damaged?

Let's pause here, Vice-Chancellor, Sir, and use this opportunity to advise parents that most of what we linguists know about language impairments or communication disorders, including aphasia, cerebral palsy, autism, stuttering or even total dumbness in people result from infantile bullying or abuse (e.g. excessive knocking on the one's child head or a baby falls frequently from adult bed). Again, how many of us here know that the advice for people on motorbikes to wear helmets has a linguistic origin? But why this advice? After all, any other part of the human anatomy is no less important than the head. The truth is that unlike other parts of the body, the head harbours a natural endowment which necessitates the

acquisition of a rare skill available only to *homo sapiens*, and that is language.

Linguists are in agreement that there is an inter-connection between language and the mind. But ethical research does not permit us to open up people's brains to examine them to see the link. By the way, if we open the brain, there is nothing concrete that we can find there to explain how the brain processes language. The worst of it is the abstract concept 'mind'. Where the mind is located is still a matter of speculation. Some argue that the mind is external to the body. We believe in our study that the aspect of the mind that processes language and other kinds of cognition is located in the brain, because it has been scientifically proven that if one gets a hard enough knock on the head, one's cognitive and linguistic abilities may be impaired (cf. Roberts, 1997:1).

It is still a mystery to us how the abstract phenomenon 'mind' or the physical substance of the brain connects with the being to aid language acquisition through exposure to samples of human language to yield the grammar of the language whose samples the child has been exposed to. What we are sure of is that all normal children (no matter the linguistic background of their parents) have this linguistic endowment in the same proportion to acquire with ease and in the same manner any language of the environment to which they have been exposed before they attain the "critical period". This linguistic endowment which is present in all normal human children has been referred to as "language acquisition programme" (LAP) (Chomsky, 1995; Roberts, 1997).

One basic concern of the comparative grammarian is to try to understand how the human mind works by metaphorically probing into it through the language the people speak, because the grammarian believes that language is the mirror of the mind. In an

effort to achieve this, grammarians construct different theories of language; one of such theories is **syntax** (our area of specialisation).

Humans speak a language using words woven together following certain rules that operate in a particular language. Anybody who speaks a language has a mental list of words in that language. This mental list of words is called the **lexicon** (i.e. vocabulary). The lexicon provides the shopping list for the syntax to work upon through various operations of (select, merge and move) to generate sentences in the language. The sentences so generated at the working area (syntax) now move for various forms of interpretation for convergence or crash.

Let us consider the following sentences from English:

- 1 a. The man chased the dog.  
b. The dog chased the dog.
- 2 a. My **old** friend is here.  
b. My friend is **old**.
- 3 a. They know my name.  
b. \*They knows my name.
4. a. Mary is a pretty fat young dark girl.  
b. \*Mary is a young fat dark pretty girl.
5. a. John saw Mary.  
b. Did John see Mary?  
c. \*Did John saw Mary?
6. a. He knows my name.  
b. Does he know my name?

- c. \*Does he knows my name?
  - d. \*Do he knows my name?
7. a. John must have been eating some rice.
- b. \*John have been must eating some rice.

Sentences (1a) and (1b) are grammatical and they contain the same words, but with different meanings. In (1a) *man* is the agent, while *dog* is the patient; but in (1b) *dog* is the agent, while *man* is the patient. The difference between this pair of sentences is dependent on the way the words interact in the separate sentences. We also see that the word *old* has two different interpretations in (2a) and (2b). In (2a), *old* refers to the age of the friendship where it contrasts with *new*. In (2b), *old* refers to the age of my friend where it contrasts with *young*. The lesson we learn from examples (1) and (2) is that the meaning of a sentence may not necessarily depend on the words that make up the sentence. In other words, syntactic context can alter the meaning of a word. Sentence (3b) rather than (3a) is ungrammatical, because it violates **subject-verb Agreement** rule in English. The problem with (4b) is the **order of adjectives** in the post-verbal position. In English, adjectives are divided into groups, depending on their semantic properties; *young* (denotes age), *fat* (denotes size), *dark* (denotes colour), while *pretty* (denotes quality). In English, an adjective of quality (*pretty*) must precede an adjective of size (*fat*), before that of age (*young*), and before colour (*dark*). That is why (4a), rather than (4b) is grammatical. In English, auxiliary verbs carry the burden of tense marking on behalf of main verbs. When an auxiliary verb occurs in a sentence, the main verb is relieved of carrying a tense marker. This explains why (5c), (6c and 6d) are ungrammatical. Sentence (7a) rather than (7b) is grammatical because of the order of auxiliary verbs. In English, the sequence of verbs in a verb phrase is, as follows: modal auxiliary (*must, will, shall, should, can, etc.*) precedes the verb ‘to have’ (*has, have*),



before any form of the verb ‘to be’ (*am, is, was, are, were, be, been, being*) before the main verb (*eating*).

In the study of syntax, we are also aware that some sentences can pass the test of grammaticality while the people reject them, because the proportions which they express are not in agreement with the speakers’ view about the world (cf. (8b) – (e) and (9)). In essence, linguistic investigation is not only about the study of speakers’ **grammatical competence**, but also their **pragmatic competence** (i.e. the knowledge of what is contextually appropriate and what is not).

8. a. My wife admires me.  
b. ?My dog admires me.  
c. ??My gold fish admires me  
d. ??My typewriter admires me.  
e. ??My birthday admires me.
9. ??Colourless green ideas sleep very furiously.

## 2.1 Universal Grammar

Earlier on, we talked about a common linguistic inheritance with which every normal human being is endowed to acquire the language spoken in their environment. This common **language faculty** is referred to as the **Universal Grammar (UG)**. UG differs from **core grammars** (i.e. individual languages). UG defines, as it were, a set of linguistic features of all human languages. It lays down the basic principles, so that each core grammar is free to select the parameters along which the principles are realised. Principles are universal attributes of human language, while parameters are the specific variations noticeable in core grammars. For instance, UG makes certain demand on word order in all languages, but the

principle of word order allows languages a bit of leeway to order words in ways that are unique to them.

Let us mention that UG is abstract; it is a mental reality. Nobody owns or speaks UG. But an understanding of the basic features of UG is important for the grammarian; at least, it will help us to have an idea of what mental computations are wired in to process language and perhaps, the connection between the human mind, language acquisition and other cognitive abilities.

The big question for the comparative grammarian is, how can we have an understanding of a phenomenon which is as abstract as the UG? The answer to the question is for linguists to embark upon aggressive research on various aspects of individual languages, not necessarily for the sake of the languages so studied, but with a view to pointing out the features that are shared by all human languages as well as the specific variations in individual languages. It is the non-shared attributes of UG (including of course differences in lexical resources of different languages) that are responsible for the different languages that we have in the world today. If there were only principles, no parameters and no differences in the lexicon of different languages, the whole world would be speaking only BABEL.

Before we leave this section, it is important to mention that linguists believe that language is created by man and not by God or gods, but the endowment for its creation is innate and divine, available only to humans. It is with language that man dominates and rules his world, even at the expense of his closest relatives in the animal kingdom.

## **2.2 Nigerian Core Grammars and Linguistic Theorising**

The history of linguistics in Nigeria dates back to early 1960s with a small number of students and staff at the University of Ibadan. In the

introduction to the festschrift in honour of Kay Williamson, Ndimele (2003:2ff) gives a brief account of some of the contributions of Nigerian languages to linguistic theory, as follows:

- a. *Word Order Parameter*: Synchronically, the basic word (neutral) order of most Nigerian languages is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO); the basic word order for languages of the Ijo family is, however, Subject-Object-Verb (SOV).
- b. *Wh-Parameter*: The fact that many Nigerian languages allow *wh*-in-situ question words; in other words, many Nigerian languages can allow their interrogative words to occur at the same position as the nominals they are used to query.
- c. *Verb Concatenation*: The predominant use of two or more verbs in a series in a single verb phrase without an overt connective, especially amongst the Benue-Congo group of languages.
- d. *Violation of  $\theta$ -criterion*: The fact that two or more  $\theta$ -roles can be conflated on a single argument, stemming from our knowledge of the behaviour of verbs and arguments in a serial verb construction. This is an issue that runs counter to Chomsky's (1981:36)  $\theta$ -criterion, which states that "each argument bears one and only one  $\theta$ -role, and each  $\theta$ -role is assigned to one and only one argument".
- e. *Split Verbs*: The existence of split verbs, where the first half occurs before the object and the second half after, e.g. Yoruba (cf. Folorunso, 2003).
- f. *Resumptive Pronoun Strategy*: In contrast to the popular view in linguistic theory, movement of constituents in some Nigerian

languages can create overt traces in the name of resumptive pronouns. This is contrary to the belief in the literature that “traces are [always] silent copies of antecedents” (Chomsky, 1995; Rizzi, 2003:90).

- g. *Verbal Extensions*: The presence of elaborate verbal extensions where bound morphemes occur to merely modify the meaning of the root word to which they are attached without changing the part of speech of the word.
- h. *Tone*: Almost all Nigerian languages, with the exception of Fulfulde make use of a variation in the pitch of the voice to trigger meaning contrast at both lexical and sentential levels of linguistic representation. This variation in the pitch of the voice is referred to as ‘**tone**’. There is overwhelming evidence that Nembe and B○u○mo○ – Ijoid lects spoken in Bayelsa, Nigeria – have **pitch-accent** (Eferè, 1994) rather than tone.
- i. *Vowel Harmony*: The existence of ATR **vowel harmony** system, especially for languages with eight vowels and above. This is a situation where the vowels of a language divide into two: **narrow** and **wide**, such that in a simple word only vowels from a particular set can co-occur.
- j. *Unusual Consonant Sounds*:
- -Presence of labial-velar stops and many other consonants involving complex articulations of different sorts in many Nigerian languages.
  - -Evidence of voiceless lateral and alveolar nasal in Tẹẹ, – an Ogoni language – spoken in Rivers State, Nigeria (cf. Ladefoged, 1995).

- -The presence of pre-nasalized stops/syllabic nasals in many Nigerian languages.
- -The presence of voiced and voiceless implosives in some Nigerian languages (e.g. Igbo, Degema).
- -Evidence of ejectives, at least in Hausa.

### **2.3 Future Concerns in the Study of Languages & Linguistics in Nigeria**

Having outlined some of the things we know about Nigerian languages in §2.2, what is left now is to present what we think should form some of the major concerns or the main agenda in the study of languages and linguistics in Nigeria for the future.

- a. A great many Nigerian languages have not been described; many have not got any settled orthography, and a sizeable number of Nigerian languages are endangered and may soon go into extinction. The urgent task before the Nigerian linguists is to record, transcribe and develop all Nigerian languages as quickly as possible, particularly those threatened by extinction.
- b. There is the urgent need to produce an authentic, more reliable 'Atlas of Nigerian Languages/Dialects'. For further information on how this can be achieved see Urua (2003).
- c. There should be an effective and more pragmatic national language policy. The current language provisions of the *National Policy on Education* cannot produce the much needed result. Uwajeh (2003) has discussed the shortcomings of the language provisions of the *National Policy on Education*.

- d. There should be adequate funds to embark upon an aggressive publishing programme in local Nigerian languages, including literary works in these languages.
- e. There is the need for constant re-training for Nigerian linguists, so that they can keep pace with the changing face of the linguistic theory.
- f. At the moment, most of the research findings of most Nigerian linguists have remained localised. Even in a particular institution, some colleagues may not be aware of what discoveries others may have made. Hence, efforts are often duplicated. The solution to this is to work out a way of co-ordinating and making public all the remarkable academic efforts of those working on Nigerian languages.
- g. It has become fashionable nowadays to find even undergraduate students referring to themselves as Applied Linguists, Sociolinguists, etc., giving little or no attention to the description of the structures of their language. The excuse often given for this is that the theories in linguistics change so fast that one can hardly keep pace with these changes. Hence, the attitude is that of avoidance. Quite frankly, nobody says that linguistic data can only be truly analyzed in the context of current frameworks. Any Nigerian linguist who has this problem, should be guided by this pronouncement by a foremost Nigerian linguist, Professor Ayo Bamgbose:

In my view, there is hardly anything to be gained in the pursuit of crass formalism. Interesting insights can emerge even from non-formalized descriptive statements (Bamgbose, 2000/2001:115).

- h. There is no doubt that we need good applied linguists and sociolinguists in this country; my worry is the present attitude of most younger generation of linguists to opt (even at the elementary stage in their study of linguistics) for applied linguistics or sociolinguistics without acquiring the basic skills needed to analyze their language. Efforts should be made to encourage more Nigerians, particularly the younger generation of Nigerian linguists to aspire first to be good descriptive linguists, before venturing into the application of the linguistic knowledge that they have gathered.
- i. The most widely spoken language in Nigeria is Nigerian Pidgin, but unfortunately it has not been accorded any recognition, and therefore cannot be used as a medium of instruction in our schools. The Nigerian linguists must continue to emphasise the communicative relevance of the Nigerian Pidgin, and the need to accord it a special status in any sensible national language policy that might emerge.
- j. Concerted efforts must be made to produce basic orthographies for all known Nigerian languages. The orthography manual series produced by National Language Centre (and now taken over by NERDC) should continue, while efforts are made to resolve conflicts that might arise from choice of the standard dialect for most Nigerian languages. The experiment by Rivers Readers Project under the leadership of Dr Tony Enyia should be encouraged. The Rivers State Reader Project in collaboration with NERDC produced orthographies of fourteen (14) Rivers State languages in two separate volumes which I edited. What remains now is official backing and training of teachers to begin to implement the orthographies in schools.

k. Nigeria presently is described as a linguistic haven with many languages interacting not only in the society, but also in individuals. Some Nigerians are polyglots; they can speak more than two languages. So, another area waiting to be fully explored by Nigerian linguists is the interaction of the different languages spoken in Nigeria, as people from different linguistic backgrounds endeavour to communicate in a simple way. Such interesting areas include the development of pidgin and creoles, or even the emergence of a more ‘bizarre’ linguistic phenomenon known as ‘mixed language’. The emergence of a mixed language at Okrika, due to a long-standing inter-ethnic interaction between Igbo and Okrika, was the centre of Wakama’s (2001) BA Long Essay. The emergence of artificial languages or secret codes, such as Agbirigba, as Nigerians try to communicate intra-/inter-linguistically is an area that also deserves attention by Nigerian linguists. In fact, Akinlabi and Ndimele (2013) have drawn the attention of the world to existence of Agbirigba, which according to them,

... is a new (possibly artificial) ‘lect’ based on the Ogbakiri dialect of Ikwere, an Igbooid language spoken in Port Harcourt... This artificial language was apparently born from the need to communicate secretly by a (recently) persecuted section of the Ogbakiri community... Given the social and ethnic strife that gave birth to Agbirigba, one would be tempted to conclude that it is an attempt by the speakers to create a means of communication not understood by their persecutors.

Agbirigba is a complicated language game based on the Ogbakiri dialect of Ikwere. Akinlabi and Ndimele (2013) further state that



“Agbirigba reflects at least two facts about human language. First, it reflects the computational and creative powers of the human brain... Secondly, Agbirigba shows that it takes very little variation for two speech forms to become distinct lects.” This is a point which supports our earlier claim, that languages of the world are the same; they differ only in lexical resources and a few parameterised variations.

### **3.0 The Main Issue**

#### **3.1 Language, Communication and Development**

It has been argued by experts that there is a close connection between language, communication and development both at the individual and national levels. Nations that are developed have taken deep-seated interest in making sure that language plays a pivotal role in all their cultural, socio-economic, educational and political activities. The reason behind this is that they have realised that language is at the centre of all cognitive abilities (both in formal and informal situations) and it is the most vital tool with which man subdues his environment. It is the only attribute of man which places him above his closest relatives (the gorillas, apes, monkeys, chimpanzees, etc.). Language, therefore, is the instrument for man to conquer and rule his world. Without a means of communication as rich and systematic as language, humans would remain impoverished and powerless, and society as we know it will remain dull and static.

Language contributes immensely to the sum of knowledge. It unifies everything and links environmental practice with cultural knowledge, and transmits everything synchronically among members of a speech community as well as diachronically between different generations (cf. Crystal, 2000:47; Egbokhare, 2011:35). Language is the basis for all cultural activities. According to

Egbokhare (2011:35), “Every group or sub-group has an associated language or manner of speech which defines social, economic, political, professional, geographical or subcultural affiliations”. That is why it is often said that when a language dies, a culture is buried together with their identity.

Crystal (2000:33-4) stresses the negative implications inherent in language death, as follows:

If diversity is a prerequisite for successful humanity, then the preservation of linguistic diversity is essential, for language lies at the heart of what it means to be human. If the development of multiple cultures is so important, then the role of languages becomes critical, for cultures are chiefly transmitted through spoken or written languages. Accordingly, when language transmission breaks down through language death, there is serious loss of inherited knowledge. Any reduction of language diversity diminishes the adaptational strength of our species because it lowers the pool of knowledge from which we can draw”.

It has been generally acknowledged that the closest cousin to poverty is illiteracy; show me a man who is illiterate and I will tell you about a man who is poor. In fact, there is a close connection between literacy and socio-economic transformation (including the acquisition of life-long skills); literacy and economic growth for a nation. By implication, the more literate the population of a country is, the more developed the country is likely to be.

Nigeria is classified among the poorest nations of the world with high illiteracy rate and where unemployment of the active population is at its peak and where the majority of the people live on less than 1 dollar per day. Language experts have, however, argued that underdevelopment in Nigeria can only be tackled with improved literacy in a commonly understood official language of communication. They are of the opinion that if Nigeria must develop through an unlimited access to quality education, there must be a language that is adequately and generally understood in all its forms by the majority of the population (the governor and the governed). What is therefore recommended for Nigeria is participatory communication. There can be no participatory democracy without participatory communication. Hence, no economic programme or economic theory (no matter how fashioned out) will make any sense until there is mass literacy of the active population of the nation through a commonly shared means of national or regional communication. We must eradicate illiteracy to achieve the desired economic prosperity in Nigeria by paying more attention to the role of language in education.

It has been argued that what Nigeria is suffering from is not falling standard in education. Rather, what we are witnessing is language failure. In other words, the language that is commonly used as the medium of instruction (i.e. the English language) in most of our schools has failed us (as pupils and even their teachers have little or no oral as well as written proficiency in it).

Language is the essential tool to acquire skills and knowledge. A child whose language skills are deficient in the medium of instruction will surely perform abysmally in any other cognitive areas involving the use of language. Such a child will not pass his subjects in school, and this is where the frustration sets in. The child drops out of school for not being able to cope with the medium of

instruction. If such a child is not guided properly to redirect his energy into other less rewarding ventures, he returns his frustration to the society that has kept him down. We are already witnessing this in the Boko Haram uprising and such other wide-spread and deadly youth gang formations all over Nigeria.

*It is true that knowledge through functional literacy is power, but language is the skill for its acquisition.* Functional literacy enables the farmer to acquire new skills and techniques to improve crop or animal yield. A functionally literate mother is a great asset to the family and the nation not only in adopting new skills and globally approved practices in family health, but also in terms of attitudinal change.

My ‘brother’, Professor Willie Okowa (personal communication), always tells me that the problem with Nigeria is “systemic corruption” and that “Nigeria is a country governed by **UNREPENTANT** and **HEARTLESS THIEVES**” and “**A LEGION OF DISHONEST PUBLIC OFFICIALS**” (emphasis mine). He also tells me that he predicted in one of his publications that a time shall come when **THIEVES** will take over governance in Nigeria, and that in fact, the time has come. I agree with him totally, and sometimes I add that the situation in Nigeria can be likened to that where **HYENAS ARE ASKED TO SUPERVISE A MEAT MARKET**. Yes, many materialistic hyenas have taken over governance in Nigeria, and that is where we are today.

Emenanjo (2013:27) also argues that corruption is endemic in Nigeria, and that it is not just the fastest growing industry in Nigeria, but the flagship industry in Nigerian and only surviving industry in the country.

The question that remains, however, is: How can we reduce the corruption index in Nigeria? Can these **THIEVES** that Professor Willie Okowa refers to formulate any policy or put together any genuine and sincere regulation to deal with corruption? The answer is simple. It is unlikely that the present crop of leaders in Nigeria can fight corruption, because **YOU CANNOT ASK MONKEYS TO CUT DOWN THE FOREST; THEY WILL DESTROY THEIR ABODE IF THEY DO.** Frankly, the solution is not near; the **THIEVES** will continue to have their way because of the backwardness and hopelessness of the governed caused by the linguistic impoverishment and disenfranchisement of the population to access quality education. In fact, an uninformed person is a severely deformed being.

If Nigeria must fight to minimize corruption, then, we must raise a cohort of multi-skilled and talented population through mass literacy in a language that will not pose a barrier to quality learning. It is these people that will fight corruption. It is the enlightened masses that will cause the desired change to happen in all frontiers, and not the current **THIEVES IN GOVERNANCE.**

We must equip the active population to access information and to aggressively pursue the acquisition of knowledge as an enterprise. When everyone knows what everybody knows, then everybody will be cautious.

### **3.2 Nigerian Languages in Global Communication**

It is no gainsaying that language is closely associated with economic prosperity of any human society. All developed nations of the world did realize, at some point in their evolution, the importance of participatory and all inclusive common means of communication in their ability to positively affect the fortunes of their citizenry. They clearly understand the vital role of language in the acquisition of

life-long skills and sensible transformation agenda. They therefore place language second to none in their educational system to drive the desired transformation in vital sectors of their economy.

Yes, it is often said that no country can develop without industrialisation through science and technology. But the truth is that science and technology cannot create the desired impact if only a minute fraction of the population of the nation can read and write in the language which serves as the medium of imparting the knowledge of science and technology. The fact is that children perform better in school if they are taught in a language they are in full control of. This experience has been reported severally by different scholars in many countries. Many developed nations have given amazing testimonies regarding the role of their languages in their educational systems and in their overall economic prosperity.

Prah (1995:45-46) captures the relevance of the mother-tongue or the language that the majority is in firm control of in scientific and technological development, as follows:

... concepts, abstract notions and scientific linguistics tools are most accessible and provide greater facility for effective usage if they are grounded in the language which provides the systematic grid for interpreting and intervening in reality. Scientific practice is the mode of this intervention. It is mother tongue which affords room for the creative application of human ingenuity. In all developed societies, science and technological development is based on the native language, cultivated as the mother tongue”.

Speaking on the relevance of the mother-tongue in technological transfer, Egbokhare (2011:38), quotes Pyrah (1995:49) as stating that

... knowledge cannot remain a culturally indigested foreign body of ideas. Knowledge must melt into the cultural landscape of the user in order to become an instrument of creativity for the learner and user.

The implication of the foregoing is captured in the adage which says that “Distance hoses do not put out the fire; local efforts do”.

The secrets of great empires are preserved in their languages, and that is why deliberate efforts are made by individuals and groups from other nations to learn languages of the industrialised nations, so as to tap into the secrets of their greatness. At various stages in human history, different languages have played key roles in civilisations, attracting special interest from non-natives to desire to learn them. Let us mention, Greek, Latin, French, English, Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, etc., as few examples. In all the situations known to man, language has remained the vehicle with which civilisations are conveyed.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, let us return home. Sadly enough Sir! No Nigerian language qualifies to be ranked amongst the first two hundred (200) most important world languages. There are parameters for this evaluation, including the desire to learn them by people from other linguistic background because of the economic values attached to learning them.

One fact which has been acknowledged by Crystal (2000) is that language behaves like any other living organism. A language grows

or dies with the fortunes of its speakers. If a people become important, their language invariably becomes important and people from other linguistic groups will aspire to learn it. But the importance of a nation depends largely on how they grow their language to combat the challenges inhibiting their progress. Show me a nation in affluence and I will tell you a language that is being sought after by people of other nations. Look at the recent craze for Mandarin Chinese, for instance.

People do not learn languages for the sake of having an additional tongue. There are communicative as well as economic motives that propel people to learn new languages. I like this quotation from Crystal (2000) whenever I talk about learning an additional language. It reads thus: “Flash dollar bills before the cripple and he will climb the Everest”. There are no motivating dollar bills woven around any Nigerian language. No Nigerian language is a conveyor of any advanced technology; there are no secrets of greatness in inventions coded in any of them. None is the language of communication and information super-highway. They are merely carriers of neglected and severely endangered cultures. Many of them are at the verge of ultimate death with little or no written literature in and about them. Many of them are steadily losing children speakers and therefore may not be handed down to the next generation. More than two-thirds of Nigerian languages have no orthography. Their vocabularies, to say the least, are grossly inadequate to cope with the communicative needs of their speakers in an ever-rapidly changing world. It hurts to say that no Nigerian language is attracting any global attention. Presently, our languages cannot compete in the global rat race.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, it is reported that every hour a language dies somewhere in the world, and that two-thirds of these deaths are recorded in Africa with Nigeria taking the lead. The painful thing



about language death is that it also entails cultural death. The death of a language marks the end of a civilisation. Unlike tangible material culture whose fossils are recoverable from archeological sites for preservation, linguistic evidence does not have such luck. The death of a language is the demise of an entire empire.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, our own linguistic Armageddon has begun. The way things are going, most of our languages cannot survive this century. Our mother-tongues are vanishing. Before our eyes, predators are steadily eating up our languages (whether the large, the medium or the small tongues). There are no exceptions; and that is why some scholars have stated that all Nigerian languages are at different stages of endangerment. Some are fairly endangered; some are severely endangered; some are moribund and others are dead.

All Nigerian languages are steadily losing speakers; the minority ones to medium and large linguistic groups around them or to English (in all its forms) or Pidgin; the large ones are losing speakers to English (in all its forms) or Pidgin. A time shall come when many Nigerians will have no competence (not even oracy) in any human language. Just imagine the frustration of man without language. We are already witnessing this in our classrooms. The students in this category are usually moody and do not participate in interactive class sessions which are required in any effective language class.

There is a course in our Department entitled “Study of a Nigerian Language” where students are supposed to learn to read and write one indigenous language (including Nigerian Pidgin) which they speak. The revelation is that some of the students have no oral mastery of a Nigerian language (including Nigerian Pidgin). What they speak can best be described as **Broken English** which is structurally different from Pidgin, because of its lack of consistency. This broken English is their best form of English. For such a student,

learning in a formal situation is impossible no matter the pedagogical maneuvering adopted by the teacher. The implication of all these is that Nigeria has begun to raise children who are uneducable because they possess no language, the basic tool to acquire knowledge.

### **3.3 Language and Communication in Education**

All over the world, it has been generally acknowledged that language is critical for education, scientific and technological development.

A critical issue in the Nigerian educational system is the poor attention paid by policy makers to the role of language and effective communication in educational achievement and its trickling-down effect on technological development. Nigeria is about one of the few countries in the world without a language policy. What we have presently is a poorly crafted language provisions in the *Nigerian Policy in Education* in its various editions which states that every child in Nigeria at the initial years in primary school should be taught in their mother-tongue or the language of the immediate environment. Unfortunately, three decades later after this pronouncement, the majority of Nigerian children start their pre-primary or primary education in a language they have no mastery of. In most cases in Nigerian schools, the child comes from home with a mother-tongue and moves straight into English in its various forms (the good, the bad and the ugly). The child is initiated into the world of formal training in a language he does not understand. What the child experiences is an immediate frustrating disconnect between home and the new environment.

Experts have lamented the consequences of introducing a child to formal education in a language that they do not fluently command. It is no wonder why the incidence of school dropouts are on the

increase as the population explodes and our environment becomes more ‘coloured’ and cosmopolitan, favouring no indigenous tongue as the language of immediate environment for all children in the same school. It is a fact that most of our children are facing difficulty in learning because of the medium of instruction used in the school. That is why there is high failure rate.

As I said earlier, the high failure rate that we witness these days is not as a result of falling standard in our educational system. The truth is that most of our today’s children are linguistically poorly equipped to face education. They learn with utmost difficulty because of the language of instruction. Most of them can barely understand English which serves as a medium of instruction in early childhood education in most schools in Nigeria. When they cannot cope, they feel intimidated by their colleagues who are better endowed, and they resign to fate. There is an adage which says that “What is learnt without joy can easily be forgotten without regret”.

As it stands today and even in the near future, no one language in Nigeria can be introduced as the only medium of instruction in all schools in Nigeria, particularly at the lower level, because of the linguistic background of children in Nigerian schools. The only option is to encourage the use of the language of the immediate environment which the children have learnt at home before being enrolled for formal training.

### **3.3.1 English Language Teacher’s Curriculum in Nigeria**

The English language is a colonial legacy bequeathed to the Nigerian people. It has come to stay, and we must face the fact. The linguistic heterogeneity of the country as well as our attitude favours its longevity. But the painful thing is that no matter the long history of the English language sojourn in Nigeria, less than 5% of the population has a good command of it, and no concerted effort is

made to improve its mastery. The assumption that we are an English-speaking country does not mean we should not pay particular attention to its teaching and learning. Our existence as a nation is intricately tied to the language no matter whatever anyone thinks. Because of the pride of place the English language occupies in both our social lives and in our educational system, concerted effort should be made to ensure that the language is properly taught in our schools at all levels.

Many people wonder why the older generation of Nigerians performed better in English and other subjects in schools than the present generation of students in Nigeria. The reasons are obvious:

- a. The older generation began their initial education in their mother-tongue or the language of the environment where they were brought up and in which they had sufficient proficiency and then gradually moved over to English in later years.
- b. The older generation were taught the language by native speakers of English or those who were taught directly by native teachers of English.
- c. The majority of today's language teachers are poorly trained, to say the least. Most of them learnt English from those who do not have firm control of the language.
- d. The curriculum for training today's language teacher has not changed radically from the curriculum used to train language teachers of the older generation, even though the circumstances of training are not the same.

In 2010, I was commissioned by the British Council to conduct an opinion pool and to critic the curricula for training English language teachers in Rivers State. I surveyed the curricula for training English teachers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUOE) and the Department of Educational Foundation in the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport).

### **3.3.1.1 English Teachers' Curriculum at IAUOE**

The major findings of Ndimele's (2010) survey of the curriculum for training English teachers at IAUOE are presented below:

- i. There are 15 Education courses at the University.
- ii. There are nine (9) language-based courses.
- iii. There are 24 other minor subject studies, including GES.
- iv. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, there is only one peripheral language-based course, i.e. English in Bilingual/Multilingual context.

When I analysed the language-based courses in terms of how they covered the four (4) major language skills and the grammatical structure of English, the result is, as follows:

- Speaking Skill: ENG 122 and ENG 221
- Writing Skill: ENG 105
- Reading Skill: Nil
- Listening Skill: Nil
- Grammatical Structure: ENG 121, ENG 222, ENG 421 and ENG 422

Only four (4) courses are concerned with (lexis) and structure in English: ENG 121, ENG 222, ENG 421 and ENG 422. Note that some of the courses at the IAUOE are one or two credit units.

From the course descriptions we studied, there are unardonable overlaps between ENG 121 and ENG 222; ENG 421 and ENG 422. One can truly say that there are two courses concerned with the study of the grammatical structure of English – one is at the lower level and the other at an advanced level in the 4<sup>th</sup> year. There is no course in the programme that equips the teachers-in-training to

handle reading and listening skills at the primary and post-primary levels. We all know that reading is the backbone of functional literacy.

### **3.3.1.2 English Teachers' Curriculum at Uniport**

The major findings of Ndimele's (2010) survey of the curriculum for training English teachers in the Department of Educational Foundation, University of Port Harcourt, are presented below:

- i. There are 20 education courses in the curriculum at the University of Port Harcourt.
- ii. There are only eight (8) language-based courses.
- iii. There are 14 other minor subject studies, including GES.

When I analysed the language-based courses in terms of how they covered the four (4) major language skills and the grammatical structure of English, the result is, as follows:

- Speaking Skill: EST 201
- Writing Skill: EST 122
- Reading Skill: Nil
- Listening Skill: Nil
- Grammatical Structure: EST 221 and EST 400

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the English language curriculum for training teachers at the University of Port Harcourt is grossly defective in all respects. The products of the system cannot be competent English language teachers as is the case for the products of the English language programme at the IAUOE, unless they undergo special in-service training programme to prepare them to teach.

Unfortunately, the English language curricula for teachers-in-training throughout the Nigerian universities are derived from the minimum standard recommended by National Universities

Commission (NUC) for all tertiary institutions. It is obvious that the minimum standard requirement by NUC is not suitable for teachers of English language-in-training and therefore needs to be reviewed. Apart from the problem of insufficient language-based courses in the curriculum, the description of the contents of some of the language-based courses leaves much to be desired. Sometimes, I wonder whether they were designed by CARPENTERS. The blame is not, however, on the implementers of the programmes of the so-called B-mark imposed on us from above. We hear that the practitioners of the industry are rarely consulted; rather NUC and Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) sometimes hire Abuja contractors to write or review school curricula.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, if we critic the English teachers training programmes in some other departments in Education, such as: Adult and Non-formal Education; Psychology, Guidance & Counselling; Curriculum Studies, etc., you will only but weep for your beloved country in terms of the quality of the content of what our products go home with. Frankly, they cannot teach English at any level judging from the content of their training.

The results of the survey of the curricula for training English language teachers at the undergraduate level in the two Universities presented in tables 1 and 2 speak volume.

**Table 1:** *Showing course distribution according Categories at IAUOE and UNIPORT*

S/No.	Courses according to Categories	IAUOE	UNIPORT
1.	Language-based	09	08
2.	Education	15	20

3.	Other minor subject studies, including GES	24	14
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**Table 2:** *Showing the Coverage of Language Skills in IAUOE and UNIPORT*

S/No.	Language Skills/Grammatical Structure	IAUOE	UNIPORT
1.	Speaking Skill	ENG 122 ENG 221	EST 201
2.	Writing Skill	ENG 105	EST 122
3.	Reading Skill	Nil	Nil
4.	Listening Skill	Nil	Nil
5.	Grammatical Structure	ENG 121 ENG 222 ENG 421 ENG 422	EST 221 EST 400

### **3.3.2 Nigerian & Finnish English Teachers' Training Curricula Compared**

In this section, I compare the curricula for training teachers in Finland and Nigerian. For Finland, the choice university is the University of Jyväskylä to which Professor A.K. Okorasaye-Orubite and I from the University of Port Harcourt joined other nominees from the Rivers State Ministry of Education for a learning tour of Finnish education for nine (9) days in November 2013. For Nigeria, the choice university is the University of Port Harcourt where I teach.

#### **3.3.2.1 Finnish English Teacher-in-Training Curriculum**

Finnish education has been described as one of the best in the world. It is founded on the principle that “all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. The same opportunities to



education should be available to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin, age, wealth or where they live” (*Finnish Education in a Nutshell*). Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. An indigenous language is used as the medium of instruction at all levels depending on the region where the school is located.

Finnish education emphasises professional competence for teachers who have emphatic autonomy and independence. The least qualification to teach in Finland is a master’s degree which takes a minimum of six (6) years: four (4) years for the bachelor’s degree and two (2) years for the master’s degree.

The minimum credit units for graduation for the bachelor’s degree in teacher education in the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, vary between 240 and 300, distributed as follows:

- 180 credit units for the subject (Mathematics, English, etc.)
- 60 credit units for methodology (Education)
- 20 credit units for general studies & communication studies
- 25 or more credit units for other minor subject studies (from the University’s offer)

**Source:** *Degree Structure 2010-2014, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.*

For the master’s degree in teacher education in the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, the minimum credit units for graduation is 120, including courses in minor subjects and communication studies.

### **3.3.2.2 Nigerian English Teacher-in-Training Curriculum**

Nigeria ranks low in terms of her quality of education. As at today, no Nigerian university ranks amongst the first 1,000 top universities in the world.

In the University of Port Harcourt, the master's degree in Language Education is one year and the maximum credit units for graduation is 18, including thesis. In fact, there are only 6 credit units for peripheral language-based courses:

- i. EDC 600: Curriculum & Instruction in Language Arts Education
- ii. EDC 602: Language Arts in Elementary/Secondary Schools

The first course, i.e. EDC 600, is more of methodology than content, as we see from the course description: "The course is concerned with the place of language in school curriculum; a survey and evaluation of a current language teaching methods" (sic). This course description is both barren and banal, to say the least.

The second course, EDC 602, is not in any way richer in content. The course description also shows strong bias for methodology than content: "The course is a critical examination of materials and methods used in teaching language arts in elementary/secondary schools..." In the first place, it is not clear what is meant by "teaching language arts". Secondly, it is worrisome why the emphasis in our curricula for training language teachers at both bachelor's and graduate programmes is in favour of "how to teach", rather than "what to teach". The big question is: Can one truly teach what one does not know?

Whereas the clamour in Nigeria is to further reduce the credit load of our students (so that "we can produce more **First Class Graduates**"), the Finnish recommends biennial upward review to accommodate new challenges in a rapidly changing world (so as to "**make their graduates globally competitive**"). The recommended credit units for training teachers in Nigeria is not up to half of the minimum credit units for training teachers at any level (bachelor's or master's) in Finland. One wonders then the competence of our

graduate teachers compared to that of the Finnish. Could it be that the Finnish graduate is over-taught and could that also be one of the reasons their educational system is about the best in the world where the rate of school drop is almost zero?

Whereas in Finland 60% of the credit units are allocated to subject-based courses and about 40% are allocated to education-based courses as well as other interests, in Nigeria, the curriculum is skewed more in favour of methodology than subject-based courses. The consequence is that the teacher may be grounded in methodology, but with a pedestrian knowledge of the subject they ought to teach. What matters in the Nigerian curriculum is how to teach but not what to teach. This is the bane of our educational system. I have argued in different fora that it would make more sense to first prepare the teacher to know what to teach and subsequently train him to teach what he knows. *No curriculum, no matter how well-designed, can force the knowledge of the subject into the head of the teacher who has not been well-grounded in his teaching subject.*

#### **4. My Professional Activities & Research Agenda**

As a burgeoning academic, I had been interested in grammar tilted towards Chomskyan syntactic theory. I followed Noam A. Chomsky's ever-changing models with zeal which culminated in the publication of my maiden book which was two restructured chapters of my PhD dissertation: *Principles and Parameters of Universal Grammar: A Government-Binding Approach* in 1992. The appearance of this controversial book and subsequent publications that followed shot me up into limelight and earned me rightly or wrongly the "infamous" nickname: **THE CHOMSKY OF NIGERIAN LINGUISTICS.**

When in 2003 I applied for elevation to the rank of professor in the University of Port Harcourt, I knew the time was ripe for me to apply my knowledge of linguistics to influence positively the study of languages and linguistics in Nigeria not for the sake of knowledge, but to see how we can influence people at the helm of affairs to accord language its pride of place in the Nigerian transformation agenda.

In order to have my way, so that my contributions would have a far-reaching effect, I contested and won the election as the National President of the Linguistic Association (LAN) world-wide, a post I held for two tenures of two years each. Prior to my election, the Association was moribund and not able to hold her annual conference for more than nine (9) years. My appearance energised the Association and brought it back to the path of prosperity. Today, it is one of the most active subject associations in Nigeria. I handed over a vibrant Association to a HARD-WORKER, Professor A.H. Amfani, who in turn handed over to Professor (Mrs.) Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche, the GOAL GETTER. I took over the editorship of the Association's journal, which is now active.

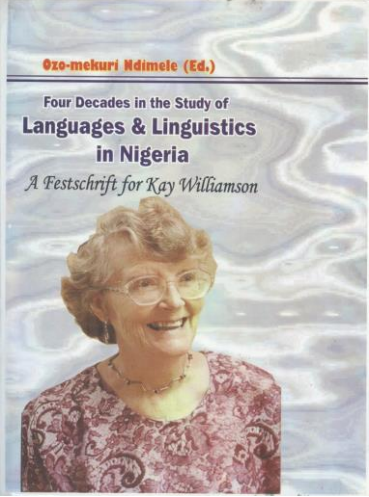
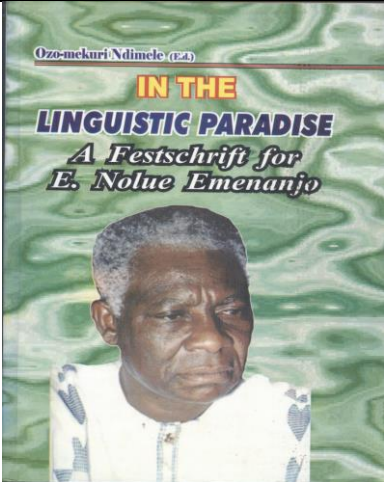
When I left the job as the National President of LAN, I was elected the National President of English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria (ELTAN). I have held this position for six (6) years.

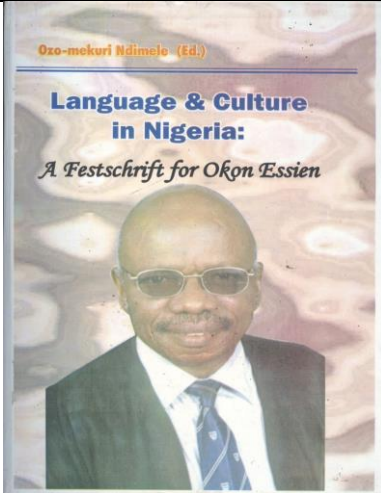
As the National President of LAN, I founded the famous Festschrift Series for Nigerian Linguists to publish well-researched papers on all aspects of languages, literatures, linguistics, cultures and communication in Nigeria. Most of the series were edited solely by me; some in collaboration with colleagues. In the editorial of the first set of the festschrift series, we announced that our target is to produce twelve (12) separate volumes, before we can sit to reflect on the success of the project and the impact. As at the moment, Vice-

Chancellor, Sir, we have produced eleven separate hefty volumes containing 723 papers on various aspects of linguistics, languages, literatures, cultures and communication in Nigeria.

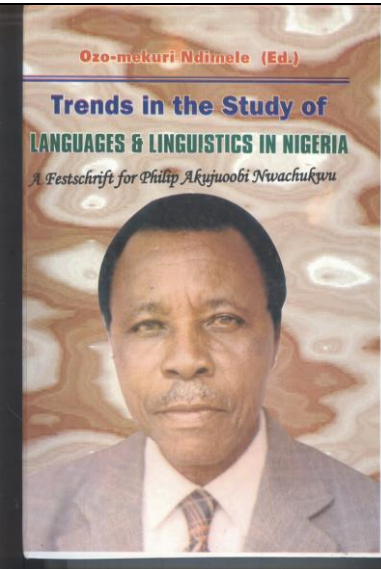
The festschrift series has become a house-hold name in the study of language and linguistics in Nigeria, to the extent that any department of language or linguistics that aspires to scale through NUC accreditation in the area of relevant research materials must have a complete stock of the series.

Below is a list of the works in the Nigerian linguists' festschrift series that have been duly published and in circulation world-wide:

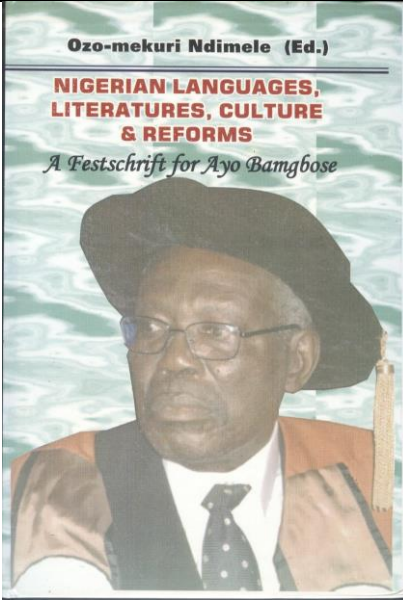
	<p><i>Four Decades in the Study of Languages and Linguistics in Nigeria</i> is about the most comprehensive book addressing the theme: “Languages and Linguistics in Nigeria”. It contains 81 well-written papers in diverse areas of language, linguistics, literature, gender studies, communication studies, and even anthropology. It is an important reference material for scholars in the humanistic science.</p>
	<p><i>In the Linguistic Paradise</i> contains 60 papers covering not only the ‘traditional’ fields of linguistics, but also the ‘secular’ areas of linguistics, e.g. language teaching and learning, lexicography, language engineering, pragmatics, stylistics, and even literature. The papers are representative of the current state of research in Nigerian languages and linguistics.</p>



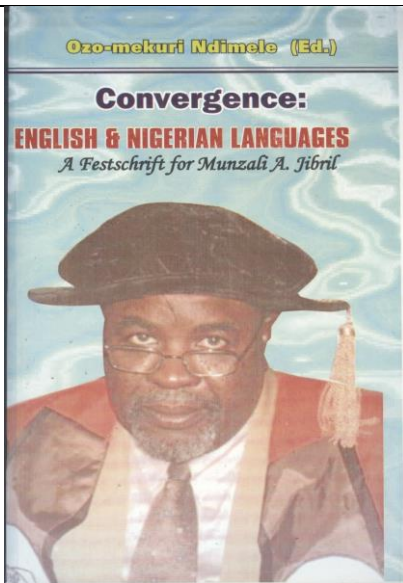
*Language & Culture in Nigeria* contains 97 papers from a wide range of areas in language and linguistics. There are 5 main sections in the book: (a) language in history and society, (b) stylistics, literature and gender issues, (c) linguistics and its application, (d) communication studies, and (e) formal linguistics. It is one book to consult and a must read for all practitioners on African linguistics.



*Trends in the Study of Languages & Linguistics in Nigeria* contains 61 papers covering a wide range of topics in linguistics and languages. The book has 3 main sections covering: (a) Applied Linguistics & Sociolinguistics, (b) Literature, Stylistics, Discourse Analysis & Gender Studies, and (c) Formal Linguistics. It is designed to cater for the needs of all in aggressive quest for knowledge of the structure and nature of human language.

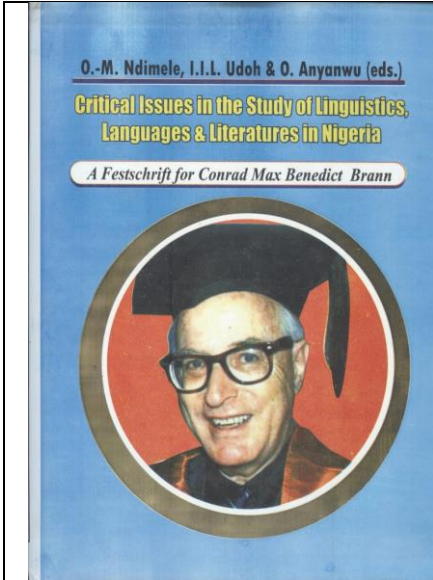


*Nigerian Languages, Literatures, Culture & Reforms* covers several aspects of Nigerian languages, linguistics, literatures and cultures. The papers were written by experts and distinguished scholars, many of whom were colleagues, friends and students (both past and present) of Professor Emeritus Ayo Bamgbose who is referred in some quarters as the father of Nigerian linguistics. The book is intended to serve as a useful reference material for scholars working in diverse areas of African linguistics and cultures.



*Convergence: English & Nigerian Languages* contains 73 chapters. Besides papers covering the main theme of this volume, i.e. the interaction between English and indigenous Nigerian languages, there are a number of papers on other secular areas of linguistics and even literature. There is also a rich section devoted to the major 'traditional' fields of linguistics (e.g. phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics).

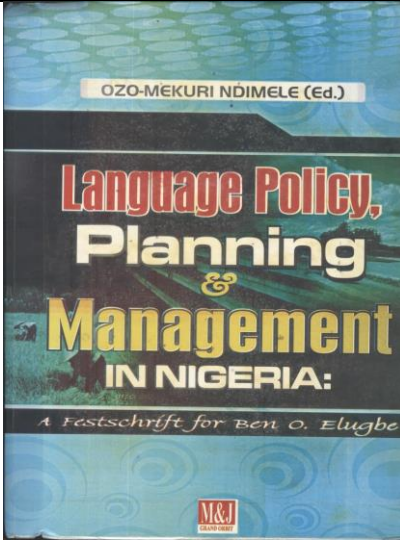




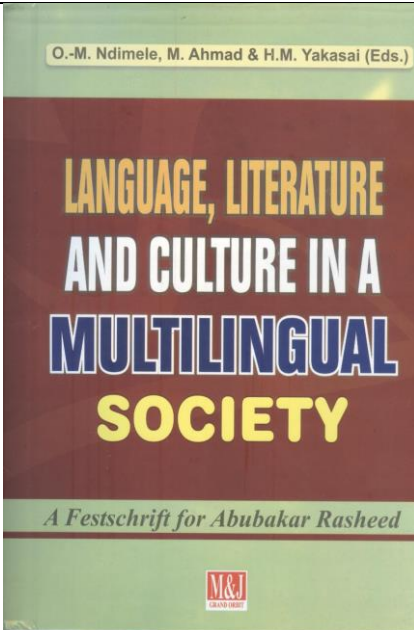
*Critical Issues in the Study of Linguistics, Languages & Literatures in Nigeria* contains 35 well-researched papers which address the needs of a variety of readers. First, it will serve as an invaluable reference material for researchers interested in the study of both secular and formal areas of linguistics as well as literatures. It will also cater for the needs of absolute beginners. There are also papers on language documentation, which is a new focus of interest in the study of languages in Nigeria.



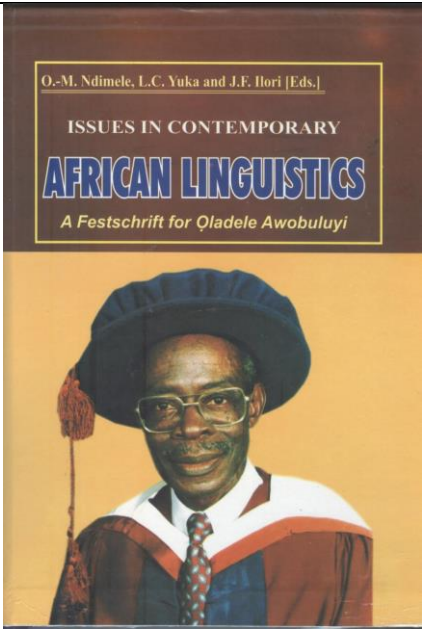
*Language, Literature & Communication in a Dynamic World* contains 62 papers. The first set of papers address the main theme of this project, i.e. Language, Literature and Communication. A number of other papers addressing various aspects of linguistics and literatures have been included to cater for other interests beyond the main focus. Our reason for doing this is to have an idea of the current state of research in linguistics, languages and literatures in Africa.



*Language Policy, Planning & Management* is an impressive volume containing 75 papers. The majority of the papers address the main theme of the book project, while others address various aspects of linguistics and literatures to cater for other interests beyond the main focus. The book is a must read for scholars who are interested in matters of language policy, planning and management and related areas in the study of languages and linguistics in Africa.



*Language, Literature & Culture in a Multilingual Society* is an important addition to the existing body of literature in the study of language and linguistics. It contains 77 papers addressing various issues in linguistics, literatures and cultures. The majority of the papers address the main theme of the book project. There are, however, a number of other papers addressing other subject-matters which have been deliberately included to cater for other interests beyond the main focus. The book is an important reference material

	<p>in the subject areas that it addresses. It is a must read for all language practitioners and even general interest groups.</p>
 <p>O.-M. Ndimele, L.C. Yuka and J.F. Ilori [Eds.]</p> <p>ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY <b>AFRICAN LINGUISTICS</b> A Festschrift for Oladele Awobuluyi</p>	<p><i>Issues in Contemporary African Linguistics</i> contains forty (40) well-researched papers selected through a rigorous assessment process out of the many submitted for consideration. The papers are grouped into four sections: Language and Society; Formal Linguistics; Applied Linguistics; Pragmatics, Language Acquisition &amp; Lexicography. Scholars will find the book immensely useful in their continuous quest for invaluable knowledge.</p>

In addition to the festschrift series, I have, since becoming professor, championed the writing and production of monumental occasional publications in language and linguistics, e.g.:

- a) *Globalisation and the Study of African Languages*
- b) *Language and Economic Reforms in Nigeria*
- c) *The Numeral Systems of Nigerian Languages*
- d) *English Studies and National Development in Nigeria.*
- e) *Language, Literature & Literacy in a Developing Nation*

I also founded the Landmarks Series to publish recently completed doctoral dissertations in any aspect of languages and linguistics in Nigeria. The essence of this project is to publicise these dissertations beyond the universities where their authors graduated. So far, we have received seven (7) manuscripts; the first five (5) in the list below have been published:

- a) *The Yoruba Nominal Constructions* by Oladiipo Ajiboye
- b) *The Syntax of Igbo Causatives* by Ogbonna Anyanwu
- c) *The Eleme Phonology* by Isaac E. Ngulube
- d) *Affixation and Auxiliaries in Igbo* by V.C. Onumajuru
- e) *Functional Categories in Igbo* by Greg Obiamalu
- f) *The Grammar of Gokana* by Isaac H. Baridisi
- g) *The Ethnography of Bette* by K.B.C. Ashipu

I also served as editor for *Orthographies of Nigerian Languages Manuals IX* and *X* (containing orthographies of 14 Rivers State languages).

I am editor of two professional associations' journals that appear regularly and which are devoted to the study of linguistics, languages and literatures in Nigeria; not to mention *Kiabara: Journal of Humanities* which also publishes, among others, papers in language and linguistics.

As the National President of ELTAN, we have continued to engage in advocacy to see how we can straighten the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria. We have been collaborating with the British Council to positively affect the fortunes of English language teaching and learning in Nigeria. Two of my colleagues, Joseph O. Ahaotu and Magaret Udoh, have been actively involved as resource persons for the British Council in training teachers of English for some states in Nigeria.

#### **4.1 The Focus of Kay Williamson Centre**

Presently, I occupy the Chair of Kay Williamson Language Studies and the Director of the Kay Williamson Centre for Language and Communications. The Centre has a functional website at: [www.kaywilliamsoncentre.com](http://www.kaywilliamsoncentre.com). We are seeking collaboration with various organisations interested in language and communications matters. The Centre's activities in the coming years shall be to conduct research and to provide services in matters concerning languages spoken in Nigeria, particularly local languages, Nigerian Pidgin and English. It hopes to be a rallying point for those interested in matters relating to language and communications in Nigeria.

##### **4.1.1 Training and Re-training Programmes**

We shall organize regular short-term programmes/workshops to train teachers and writers for local languages as well as to provide ancillary services for individuals who wish to improve their skills in English and Pidgin English. We shall continue to collaborate with ELTAN to lobby and to persuade the Federal Government to think of establishing an Inter-university campus (in the name of English Village) for the study of English and (re-)training of teachers of English to fill the gap in our school system at all levels.

##### **4.1.2 Computational Linguistics**

We need to emphasise the study of computational linguistics to enable our graduates to maximize the opportunities that abound in this new area. It is a fact that computational linguists are greatly sought after by Google and other agencies involved in software development. The first one full month training programme is planned before the end of 2015.

### 4.1.3 Language Description & Documentation

Another major area we hope to focus attention on is documentary linguistics. As we said earlier, all Nigerian languages are endangered. There is therefore an urgent need to begin to document them for posterity in the event of death. We want to document and archive as many languages as possible, particularly those spoken in the Niger Delta, beginning first with those that are severely endangered. We have started with Defaka and Nkoroo (both spoken in the Nkoroo District of Opobo/Nkoroo Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria). We collaborated with Professor Akin. Akinlabi of Rutgers University and Dr. Bruce Connell of York University through funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to carry out a comprehensive documentation of these two Ijoid lects. The outstanding result of this endeavour was the writing of two PhD dissertations each on Defaka and Nkoroo by Inoma Essien (2013) and Ebitare F. Obikudo (2013), respectively.

Language documentation is an expensive exercise. It needs adequate funding in order for one to do a good job and to preserve the language in a form that is easily retrievable. Our purpose in documenting the languages is not just to show evidence that at some point in history, a certain language was spoken in a certain region, but also in case there may be need for its owners to want to revive the language at some point in the future.

Our interest in language documentation and perhaps revitalization stems largely from the fact that a language that is not communicatively important beyond the family of its speakers today, may become important tomorrow if a vital aspect of the secret of greatness is hidden in it. By the way, *who knows the language of rapture, the language of the anti-Christ or the language in which the trumpet shall sound?* To us linguists, every language is important, and therefore must be protected and allowed to live on.

#### **4.1.4 Forensic Linguistics**

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, we want to leave behind a legacy for the University of Port Harcourt, particularly in one area of current global interest, i.e. **FORENSIC LINGUISTICS** or what has been variously referred to as **Legal Linguistics** or **Language and the Law**. What we have been waiting for to actualise this dream is a Law Faculty, which is in place now.

Forensic Linguistics is an interdisciplinary study which involves the application of linguistic knowledge, methods and insights to the forensic context of law, crime investigation, trial, and judicial procedure.

Our knowledge of human language has revealed that each human being has his/her peculiar/unique **linguistic fingerprint** similar to the popular fingerprint. In other words, each human being uses language differently, and that this difference between people involves a collection of markers which stamps a speaker or writer as a unique creature.

Forensic linguistics has shown much promise in investigating crimes, such as kidnapping, ransom/hoax calls or texts, suicide notes, plagiarism, anonymous mails, hate mails, cyber bullying, witness statement fabrication, suspicious deaths, murders, terrorism, defamation, slander, fraud and forgery, robbery, assault of all forms, harassment and stalking, theft, burglary, and other manners of offences where some linguistic fingerprints have been left behind as evidence.

There are two main areas where forensic linguistics is applied in judicial procedure:

- a) authorship determination, and
- b) voice identification.

Authorship determination involves checking an individual's word length average, average number of syllables per word, article frequency, type-token ratio, use of punctuation marks, particularly in terms of overall density, and evaluation of **hapax legomena** (unique words in a text), etc.

Voice identification/forensic phonetics can reveal information about a speaker's social and regional background. It can determine similarities between the speakers of two or more separate recordings. Voice recording can be useful as it allows victims and witnesses to indicate whether the voice of a suspect is that of the accused. There are softwares now to analyse and interpret acoustic/sound qualities/resolutions of individuals. These can be used to prove the authorship of a recorded speech output. **Vowels** and their associated **formant frequencies** have proved more useful in voice identification than **consonants**.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, now our University has gone entrepreneurial; the establishment of a programme in Forensic Linguistics (with its associated laboratory) is one of the prime areas to invest in. We will be the first in Africa to do so and we shall consult for the judiciary, the police and telecommunications industries in Nigeria and the whole of Africa. As crime rates are on the increase globally, so the job of the forensic linguists becomes more and more germane. Imagine a situation where we work with all the telecommunications companies in Africa to incorporate linguistic fingerprint (particularly subscriber's speech specimen) as part of the essential bio-data to obtain a phone line. These can serve as the data base to investigate ransom or threat calls from kidnappers, terrorists and other offences involving linguistic fingerprints. We can consult for most tertiary institutions in Africa to put a check on plagiarism through textual/**corpora** analysis and synthesis.



Linguistic fingerprints have proved to be superior to and more authentic than any other anatomical signposts for individual's identity in crime investigation. A criminal can decide to undergo anatomical reconstruction to evade justice (e.g. facial or nasal reconstruction, breasts/buttocks enhancement, genital recreation, and all manners of anatomical mutilations). Even when a criminal decides to undergo **laryngual** transplant (i.e. replacement of the **voice box** or **Adam's Apple**), his acoustic/sound resolutions are not so adversely affected because there are many other human organs that participate in speech production which no medical practice can comprehensively isolate and uproot.

An interesting question one may ask is: what happens to the acoustic/sound resolution of a person who is suffering from *laryngitis* or cancer of the larynx? Any person suffering from any of these ailments may come down with hoarseness or loss of voice. Unlike cancer of the larynx which can cause prolonged loss of voice or even death, laryngitis is a minor viral infection which can disappear after a week with or without medication. It is important to mention that voice mimicking or voice falsification does affect machine resolutions of an individual's linguistic fingerprint, even though the sounds may be perceptually or auditorily distorted.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, Forensic Linguistics is a groundbreaking, interesting and money-spinning programme that we must encourage, and this is an important area I want to donate the balance of time here and resources to promote. We have opened up communication with the world's foremost Centre for Forensic Linguistics at Aston University, Birmingham, United Kingdom. Discussions are ongoing for a couple of us from my Department to attend and to participate actively in their next Summer Course on Forensic Linguistics.

## **5. Memories Verses**

Having examined the linguistic situation in Nigeria and its impact on our overall development, it is perhaps important to leave us with the following memory verses to ponder over and to see ways of actualising them:

- a. Over half of Nigerian languages will vanish in the next century unless urgent measures are put in place to safeguard them.
- b. At the moment and perhaps in the near future, no one indigenous Nigeria language can serve as the sole medium of instruction in all our schools or official language of national communication. The sentiments and emotional attachments to one's native language are still very strong to favour any one local language as the lingua franca.
- c. Competence in English by the Nigerian populace is on the steady decline and we cannot continue to tie our destiny around a language that the majority of the people cannot speak, unless something radical is done to improve its learning.
- d. The curriculum for training English language teachers in Nigeria is overly defective; so are their products.
- e. Not much learning is taking place in our schools because of the linguistic barrier existing between the teacher and the pupils. Inadequate learning culminates in low academic achievement which has obvious implications for the individual and the nation.

### **5.1 What can we do?**

- a. We must encourage our children to speak their languages and fund linguists to embark on aggressive documentation of some of the severely endangered indigenous languages.
- b. We should recognise and promote regional or state-wide languages, by making them official languages in their various states or regions.
- c. We should use the hitherto recognised official regional language in each region or state as the medium of instruction in that

region or state, while effort is made to encourage the learning of the English language for national communication.

- d. Where it is impossible to have one state-wide language to serve as a medium of instruction mostly at the primary and post-primary schools, Nigerian Pidgin should fill that gap. There are nations, mostly those in the Caribbean, where pidgins and creoles serve as official languages and they are doing well.
- e. We should step up the teaching and learning of English, including reviewing and upgrading the curriculum for the training of English language teachers. The teacher is central to education and any substantial improvement in the standard of education should necessarily begin with corresponding increase in the social relevance of the teacher and his professional suitability as envoy of learning.
- f. The 120 minimum and 150 maximum credit unit load as recommended by NUC for the training of English language teachers should be re-examined.
- g. The 6 credit units allocated to the so-called language-based courses stemming from NUC b-mark at the graduate programme should be reviewed upwards. The Language Arts programme at the graduate level should collaborate with colleagues in Linguistics/English departments to produce the requisite manpower to effectively teach the language-based courses. Creating unnecessary empires and jealously guarded territories will not do our products any good.
- h. There is an urgent need to set up a functional English Language Centre supervised by native speakers to run short-term English language programmes, including in-service training for teachers.

"Man is a rational animal who always loses his temper when called to act in accordance with the dictates of reason" (Oscar Wilde).

Thank you!

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## ***CITATION ON*** **PROFESSOR OZO-MEKURI NDIMELE**



Professor Ozo-mekuri Ndimele, an academic giant and icon of our time, was born on 13 August, 1963, to the family of Late Chief Maxwell A. Ndimele-Nwaughu and Late Mrs. Augusta Ndimele-Nwaughu in Akirika Ogida in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. He is the second son in a polygamous family of thirteen children. He started his early childhood education at State School Ogida Etche; his secondary education was at St. Joseph's Secondary School Umuaturu Etche and his university education was at the University of Port Harcourt. He bagged a PhD in Comparative Syntax in 1991.

Professor Ndimele is a university teacher and administrator. He is a Professor of Comparative Grammar and Communications with the University of Port Harcourt. He has held many administrative positions in the University of Port Harcourt, including Managing Editor, University of Port Harcourt Press Ltd; Acting Head, Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies from 1999-2005; Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Port



Harcourt (2010-2014) and now Chair/Director Kay Williamson Centre for Language & Communications, University of Port Harcourt.

Professor Ndimele is a prolific writer and publisher. He has published over 75 journal articles/chapters in books, 7 monographs and over 26 books, excluding a number of nomadic titles. Some of the books are: (1) *The Principles & Parameters of Universal Grammar*, (2) *An Advanced English Grammar & Usage*, (3) *Semantics and the Frontiers of Communication*, (4) *Morphology & Syntax*, (5) *Readings on Language*, (6) *A Concise Grammar and Lexicon of Echie*, (7) *Four Decades in the Study of Languages & Linguistics in Nigeria*, (8) *In the Linguistic Paradise*, (9) *Languages & Cultures in Nigeria*, (10) *Globalisation & the Study of Languages in Africa*, (11) *Trends in the Study of Language & Linguistics in Nigeria*, (12) *Fundamentals of Mass Communication*, (13) *Languages & Economic Reforms in Nigeria*, (14) *Convergence: English and Nigeria Languages*, (15) *Language, Literature and Culture in Nigeria*, (16) *Critical Issues in the Study of Linguistics*, (17) *Languages & Literatures in Nigeria*, (18) *Issues in African Languages & Linguistics*, (19) *Language Policy, Planning and Management in Nigeria*, (20) *Numeral Systems of Nigerian Languages*, (21) *Language, Literature & Culture in a Multilingual Society*, (22) *Issues in Contemporary African Linguistics*, (23) *The Etche Nation in the New Millennium: Matters Arising*, (24) *English Studies & National Development in Nigeria*, (25) *Language, Literature & Literacy in a Developing Nation*, (26) *Language, Literature & Communication in a Dynamic World*, etc. Professor Ndimele is Editor of three international journals and Founding Editor of the Landmark Series to publish outstanding PhD dissertations in Nigeria in Language and Linguistics.

Professor Ndimele has served as external examiner and professorial assessor for a number of universities: University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Ignatius Aguru University of Education; University of Ibadan; University of Uyo; Abia State University; Imo State University; Ambrose Alli University; University of Benin; Benue State University; University of Lagos; University of Jos; Delta State University; Ahmadu Bello University; University of Maiduguri; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Federal University of Technology, Minna; University of Ghana Legon, etc.

Professor Ndimele was the National President of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria world-wide (2003 – 2008) and the current National President of the English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria. He was the Rivers State Chapter President of the Alumni Association of the University of Port Harcourt and the penultimate National President of the University of Port Harcourt Alumni Association. He had served on the governing board of two national bodies: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Abuja, and the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) and he was a member of the Rivers State Scholarship Board. He was also a board member of the Rivers State Post-Primary Schools Board. At the moment, Professor Ndimele is a member of Rivers State Economic Advisory Council; member Shell/Oando and Rivers State Oil/Gas Negotiating Team and member Rivers State Peer Review Committee.

Professor Ndimele has a special gift from God to attract good fortunes to whatever he heads: the one-time almost moribund Linguistic Association of Nigeria, the previously under-subscribed Dept. of Linguistics & Communication Studies (now the pride of the Humanities); the revival of *Kiabara: Journal of Humanities* which was dead for 18 years; the creative leadership of the University

Alumni Association (now competitive) and the vibrancy infused in the Deanship of the Faculty of Humanities, etc.

Prof. Ndimele is married to Mrs Joy Adamma. The marriage is blessed with four children: a boy and three angels.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, distinguished audience, I present to you this day this rare gem, though diminutive in stature, but a giant in several noble fields; this academic colossus of our time; this astute and consummate teacher; this resourceful, indefatigable and assiduous academic; this uncelebrated philanthropist and a seasoned administrator in whose honour we are gathered here today. Mr Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, this is PROFESSOR OZO-MEKURI NDIMELE, the 112th University of Port Harcourt Inaugural Lecturer.

Thank you.

**Professor Emmanuel Calvin Emasealu**